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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT3132, LEBANON: SHIA HEALTH MINISTER EVALUATES HIZBALLAH,

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT3132</a>	<a href="#">2006-09-28 08:08</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 003132

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/26/2016

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SHIA HEALTH MINISTER EVALUATES HIZBALLAH,  
POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

11. (S) Shia Health Minister Khalifeh (Shia, allied with Nabih Berri) told the Ambassador that while Hizballah is cornered in a security sense, it remains potent and dangerous politically and could even make major inroads into Lebanon's Sunni community. He speculated that Hizballah is using Michel Aoun to push for a national unity government because Hizballah could not otherwise expand its influence sufficiently in a cabinet which already has its quota of Shiites. He speculated that Hizballah would soon be compelled to disarm one way or another. Meanwhile, relations between PM Siniora and Speaker Berri remain difficult following the "unnecessary" Jezzini affair, and Shia-Sunni relations in general are tense. One way out of Lebanon's current political blockage may be to propose early elections and push for a new electoral law. End Summary.

12. (S) The Ambassador and Polchief called on Shia Health Minister Mohammad Khalifeh (one of three Shia ministers in the cabinet who are allied with Nabih Berri) in his office September 27 to discuss the Lebanese political scene. Khalifeh was troubled by what he saw as an "escalation" in the tone of the political discourse; provocation is going out of control. There were "too many" in the crowd at the Hizballah rally last Friday; this is not the time for the other parties to confront them.

HIZBALLAH IN A BOX, BUT POLITICALLY DANGEROUS

13. (S) Now that UNIFIL is here in force, Khalifeh continued, we must focus on technical issues. Hizballah is not as free to move around, the Ambassador suggested, and Khalifeh agreed. They know their old freedom is over, but they need to come out with a moral victory and a propaganda victory. Then, he continued, we need to bring them into the inner circle. We can't get rid of them; they are making too much of a reputation for themselves looking after the poor.

14. (S) If they get their internal organization right, Khalifeh said, Hizballah, with its financial resources, will be in a position to control a large part of the Sunni population of Lebanon also. That would be our nightmare scenario, he said.

15. (S) Hizballah is under careful watch from Tehran, Khalifeh said, but cannot do much in south Lebanon at present. However, if Syria fails to make an arrangement with UNIIIC and the Hariri tribunal,0 Hizballah will make our lives hell, he said, and there will be a return to car bombs and terror attacks. Syria can also use its Palestinian proxies and sleeper agents in Lebanon.

16. (S) If Syria does make a deal on the UNIIIC inquiry, Hizballah will make our lives hell politically, he said. Syria has also been making inroads in Tripoli by inviting Sunni clerics and other leaders for training and indoctrination in Syria.

NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT

17. (S) The Ambassador noted that Hizballah has been using a negative marketing campaign to obtain its goal of a national unity government. Khalifeh agreed, and added that Hizballah is only coordinating with Aoun because there is no other way

for them to expand their influence in the cabinet. There are five Shia members of the Council of Ministers, he noted, and that number can't be changed to six or four. Even if the cabinet is expanded to 30 members, only one additional Shia seat is gained. Thus, Hizballah has expanded to be as influential as it can be without controlling minister slots belonging to other confessional groups -- i.e., Christian ministers. That is why the alliance with Aoun is so important to Hizballah, to allow Hizballah to gain a blocking minority inside the cabinet by including Christian ministers belong to Aoun.

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¶8. (S) When the LAF deployed to the south, Khalifeh added, Hizballah entered into political difficulties, and this lay behind its increasing emphasis on a government of national unity. He observed that the present government cannot be dissolved before forming a new one, because not only will President Lahoud withhold the new government's approval but the political maneuverings to form a new cabinet will be endless. Therefore Aoun's proposal of a national unity government remains Hizballah's only recourse to expand its power. Aoun would ask for a "main ministry" such as Justice, Khalifeh suggested, as well as a number of new ministers without portfolio.

¶9. (S) How could Lahoud be made to agree, the Ambassador asked. Khalifeh responded that Lahoud can't stand against the Christians (meaning, presumably, Aoun and his followers). Lahoud has few interests other than survival -- delaying the time at which he will have to leave the office. After Ramadan, Khalifeh suggested, the government will be under greater pressure to form the national unity cabinet.

¶10. (S) What would Hizballah gain, the Ambassador asked; they already have means to exercise power. Khalifeh suggested that the party wants blocking power in the cabinet (i.e., one-third plus one of the ministers). They want assurances over UNSCR 1701, including that the resolution won't be used "for political purposes" or for controlling the border.

#### HIZBALLAH MUST DISARM

¶11. (S) Hizballah must change, Khalifeh said. They can't refuse to. UNSCR 1701 has finished them as an armed group. They will disarm in the same exercise as other parties following the Civil War. They should be incorporated into the LAF, and they will then fade away as an identity within 7-10 years, as no new generations of Hizballah fighters will be recruited. When asked why Hizballah -- or Iran -- would agree to such a future, Khalifeh said that "everyone will oppose them, including the Shiites in the south." They want the government to return to their lives, Khalifeh said, and that means the LAF. Hizballah has 4-5,000 full-time followers, Khalifeh estimated.

¶12. (S) The Ambassador noted that some had interpreted Nasrallah's speech last Friday to say that Hizballah would not disarm until there was a "clean and just government" in place and that Nasrallah was the sole arbiter of when the government achieved that state of cleanliness and justice. The Minister suggested that that was a misinterpretation, and that Nasrallah may not have been watching his words carefully if he left that impression.

¶13. (S) Khalifeh noted that in three cases, Hizballah redlines had been crossed. The LAF had deployed to the south; UNIFIL was given an expanded mandate; and UNIFIL had taken on the role of maritime patrolling, all against Hizballah's will. On the latter, he noted the personal role he had played in getting Council of Ministers approval, making the proposal himself in the cabinet in order to provide cover for Speaker Berri and Shia Minister of Foreign Affairs Salloukh to support a maritime role for UNIFIL.

Although the Shia on the cabinet split over the decision, with Hizballah dissenting, the Ambassador noted that the current cabinet has not been a bad one for Hizballah.

#### JEZZINI AFFAIR

¶14. (S) The Minister said that the recent flap over Surete Generale chief Wafic Jezzini had added unnecessary tension to the relationship between Speaker Berri and PM Siniora. Jezzini is with Hizballah, and therefore Berri doesn't care for him anyway, Khalifeh added. However, he explained, there was a deal between them that Siniora broke by not addressing in last week's Council of Ministers meeting the proposal, which Siniora himself had added to the agenda, of creating a committee to examine the question of whether or not Jezzini was under the authority of Acting Interior Minister Fatfat. Siniora had gone on to support Fatfat's move to refer Jezzini

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to the state prosecutor's office, raising the temperature.

¶15. (S) The Ambassador characterized as scandalous the fact that Jezzini had permitted Syrians to enter and leave Lebanon without a record, and Khalifeh agreed that the security services should be placed in a coordination mechanism and answer to a "higher commission."

#### SHIA-SUNNI TENSIONS AND ELECTIONS

¶16. (S) In general, Shia-Sunni tensions are "high, but not at a peak" Khalifeh said. The Ambassador noted that the PM needs to rebuild his partnership with Berri, which is currently broken. Khalifeh noted that Berri is also not supporting Siniora or Hariri with the institutions of government. The Ambassador recounted that he had suggested to Berri that if the National Dialogue remains impossible, that he should look at issues such as the electoral law to focus the energies of different factions toward a common goal.

¶17. (S) The Minister suggested that a proposal for early elections could focus politicians on reforming the electoral law. The Minister continued that he would soon table an election law before the Council of Ministers and also push for early approval of ambassadorships for Washington, New York and other key posts.

FELTMAN